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ST. EUSTATIUS IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION¹

SOME islands are, because of their geographical situation, destined by nature to be permanently the home of extensive commerce. Such are Manhattan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Others are so placed that political circumstances may for a brief period, or during the continuance of a particular war, elevate them into sudden commercial greatness and give them a short but picturesque career of prosperity, while ill winds blow on harbors usually more favored. A familiar example is that of Nassau during the American Civil War. But seldom has an island port had a more meteoric career, or shown a more striking contrast between insignificance in time of peace and resounding prosperity in war-time, than that presented by the little volcanic island of St. Eustatius. Its tale is worth telling, partly on this account, partly on account of the close association of its fortunes with those of the American Revolutionary War, and the important part which it played in enabling our forefathers to sustain that difficult and unequal struggle.

St. Eustatius is a small rocky island near the northeast corner of the West Indian chain. It is neither large nor fertile. Its area is less than seven square miles ; and at the time of the Revolution it did not produce more than six hundred barrels of sugar a year.² It had but one landing-place, and its fortifications had never been important. But its relative position was such as to give it, in the hands of the Dutch, exceptional advantages. The ancient British colony of St. Christopher lay but some eight miles to the southeast. Northward, a few miles farther away, lay the French island of St. Bartholomew. St. Croix, a Danish island to the westward, was but little more remote ; and beyond, at no great distance, lay St. Thomas and the Spanish colony of Porto Rico, while beyond St. Christopher, to the southeastward, lay intermingled the rich islands belonging to England and to France — Antigua, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Grenada, Tobago. Under the old system of colonial management, typified by the Navigation Acts, each country persisted in the endeavor to monopolize to itself the commerce of its colonies, whether continental or insular. But the Dutch had early been converted to the princi-

¹ A lecture delivered at the Naval War College, Newport, in August, 1902.

² *Gazette de Leyde*, April 6, 1781, p. 7.

ples of colonial free trade. Accordingly St. Eustatius, a free port belonging to a highly commercial nation and set in the midst of English, French, Danish, and Spanish colonies, then rich and prosperous, but managed on the restrictive system which prevailed before Adam Smith, had even in times of peace the opportunity to become an important mart of trade.

When war prevailed between England and France or Spain, and the prohibitions of mutual intercourse between the islands were enforced by vigilant cruisers and eager privateers, the neutral trade of St. Eustatius flourished still more, and drew in a far larger population than that of peaceful days.¹ There can be no better description of its rise than that which Burke gave in the House of Commons.² The island, he said, "was different from all others. It seemed to have been shot up from the ocean by some convulsion; the chimney of a volcano, rocky and barren. It had no produce. . . It seemed to be but a late production of nature, a sort of *lusus naturae*, hastily framed, neither shapen nor organized, and differing in qualities from all other. Its proprietors had, in the spirit of commerce, made it an emporium for all the world; a mart, a magazine for all the nations of the earth. It had no fortifications for its defence; no garrison, no martial spirit, nor military regulations. Its inhabitants were a mixed body of all nations and climates; not reduced to any species of military duty or military discipline. Its utility was its defence. The universality of its use, the constant neutrality of its nature, which made it advantageous to all the nations of the world, was its security and its safeguard. It had risen, like another Tyre, upon the waves, to communicate to all countries and climates the conveniences and the necessities of life. Its wealth was prodigious, arising from its industry, and the nature of its commerce."

But Burke's remarks, in this speech of 1781, are obviously based partly on the experience of the war then in progress, and have led us into a little anticipation. Let us go back to the beginning of the war, and especially to the days before the French alliance, when as yet the contest was merely one between Great Britain and her revolted colonies and had not widened into a European war. On the whole the best source for a knowledge of doings at St. Eustatius during those early days is the correspondence of Sir Joseph Yorke, British ambassador at The Hague, with the secretaries of state and other officials in London. A large mass of copies from

¹ An anonymous pamphlet of 1778 (whose title I have mislaid) states the agricultural population as 120 whites and 1200 blacks. See also Lord Shelburne's remarks, in Hansard, XXI. 1028.

² Hansard, XXII. 220, 221.

that correspondence is to be found among the manuscripts of President Sparks in the library of Harvard University,¹ and another among the papers of George Bancroft at the Lenox Library. Yorke, who had represented his country in the Netherlands ever since 1751, seems to have had most ample means of secret information as to the doings of Dutch traders. His letters, when combined with such materials as we may obtain from other sources, afford a striking picture of the use made of St. Eustatius by the Americans, and must, I think, convince us that the island played a far greater part in the economy of the Revolution than most persons suppose.

In the first place, the war, and the non-importation agreements which preceded it, had cut off at one blow the supply of British manufactures to the American colonies. It was true that the native American inventiveness would in time supply their place. The mute inglorious "hired man," who could do anything with a jack-knife, the versatile Jonas of Mr. Abbott's fancy, would blossom forth as the Yankee inventor. But this would take time; and in the meanwhile it was very convenient to have in the neutral islands of the West Indies a means of temporary supply and a market for American exports. The trade ventures of states as well as of individuals were often carried on in this way. As early as March, 1776, we find Abraham van Bibber agent of the state of Maryland at St. Eustatius, taking care of cargoes sent or underwritten by the state. In the archives of Virginia there are letters from him, addressed to the Virginia committee of safety. In June of the same year Van Bibber of St. Eustatius and Richard Harrison of Martinique announce that they have formed a copartnership, and solicit from the Virginia committee a portion of their custom.²

After France entered into the war, French carriers and French islands like Martinique became ineligible, and the position of the Dutch neutrals became doubly profitable.³ Merchants of the neighboring British islands tried to keep their goods safe in case of French attack by storing them on St. Eustatius.⁴ John Adams, writing to the president of Congress in 1779, after his return from his first mission to Europe, mentions the growing trade through that island as a reason which may justify the attempt to cultivate closer diplomatic relations with the republic of the United Nether-

¹ Sparks MSS., LXXII.

² *Maryland Archives*, XI. 266, 442, 443, 494, 501, 555; Force, *American Archives*, fourth ser., VI. 905; MS. letters of March 11, 23, 28, June 14, July 25, August 15, 1776, in the Virginia archives.

³ Mr. H. T. Colenbrander, *De Patriottentijd*, I. 114, says that the activity of the Dutch trade to the western world was suddenly doubled by the American Revolution.

⁴ Hannav, *Admiral Rodney*, 152.

lands, relations which he afterwards did so much to promote.¹ The close diplomatic intimacy between Great Britain and Portugal enabled British armed vessels, secure of a shelter in the ports of the latter country, to cruise off the Azores and in other situations well adapted for checking the voyages of French and Spanish vessels to the West Indies ;² which of course threw West Indian commerce more and more into the hands of the Dutch and of St. Eustatius. A Dutch rear-admiral, who spent thirteen months there in 1778–1779, reports that 3,182 vessels sailed from the island during the time of his stay.³ A careful English observer declared that in 1779 some 12,000 hogsheads of tobacco and 1,500,000 ounces of indigo came to it from North America, to be exchanged against naval supplies and other goods from Europe.⁴ British traders, too, under the guise of voyages to St. Christopher, embarked in ventures to the neighboring Dutch emporium, careful however to take out separate policies of insurance on the two voyages from England to St. Christopher and from thence to St. Eustatius.⁵ Indeed, in 1780 an act was passed encouraging in some particulars the trade with the neutral islands,⁶ though of course not purporting to countenance in any way the trade thence to the revolted colonies.

Many passages in the diplomatic history of our Revolution show that St. Eustatius was one of the chief, and at times the quickest and safest, means of communication between our representatives abroad and the Continental Congress and its officials at home.⁷ An informant of Lord Suffolk at Rotterdam tells him in March, 1777, that Messrs. Willing and Morris of Philadelphia have written to a Rotterdam merchant, their correspondent, that he can write by way of St. Eustatius, as they will henceforth have regular means of intercourse with that island, while a letter of June succeeding shows that at that time there had for a long while been no direct communication between the United Provinces and the United States.⁸

But such shifting of trade routes is a part of the ordinary fortunes of war. The enrichment of the Dutch West Indies would

¹ *Works*, VII. 104.

² John Jay, in Wharton, *Diplomatic Correspondence*, III. 717, 718.

³ From the journal of Count Lodewijk van Bylandt ; J. C. de Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeezeven*, IV. 384.

⁴ *Nieuwe Nederlandsche Jaerboeken*, 1781, p. 794.

⁵ *Authentic Rebel Papers seized at St. Eustatius*, London, 1781, p. 15.

⁶ Hansard, XXII. 232. The reference is to the Tobacco Act, 20 Geo. III., c. 39.

⁷ *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, III. 38, 193, 199, 433 (Lovell, Franklin, Jay, 1779); *Annual Register*, 1781, p. 259 (a letter of John Adams, 1780, intercepted near St. Eustatius, also printed in *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 193); *ibid.*, IV. 624, 779 (John Adams, 1781, relating to a portion of his correspondence captured when Rodney took the island); *Corr. of the late President Adams*, 258; *Works of John Adams*, VII. 510 (1782).

⁸ Yorke Papers, in Sparks MSS., LXXII., March 21, June 17, 1777.

not necessarily have been a great grievance to the British mind. What excited the English administration to a violent pitch of resentment against St. Eustatius was the fact that it was made the means of an enormous export of military supplies to the American armies, and later of naval supplies to the maritime forces arrayed against England in the Caribbean. It was true that, as early as March 20, 1775, the States General of the United Netherlands, at Yorke's instance, had issued a proclamation,¹ following upon the British Orders in Council of the preceding October,² forbidding the exportation of warlike stores or ammunition to the British colonies in America, or to any place without permission of one of the Colleges of Admiralty. But even before the earlier, or British, prohibition, and before the meeting of the first Continental Congress, the movement had begun.³ By the end of the year 1774 it was noted that there had lately been a prodigious increase in the trade from St. Eustatius.⁴ Two Boston agents were in Amsterdam all that winter buying gunpowder and stores.⁵ After the issue of the Dutch prohibition, Yorke's correspondence shows how early and how constantly it was evaded. The States General and the Council of State had issued it, but the "admiralties," who should have executed it, were not too vigilant.⁶ It is familiar to what straits the Continental army was often reduced for want of gunpowder, and how Congress, in October, 1775, recommended the assemblies and conventions of the states to export provisions to the foreign West Indies in order to get arms and ammunition.⁷

Early in March, 1776, a merchant at Campveere writes Yorke that a favorite way in which to take ammunition to the Americans is to load for the coast of Africa but then go to St. Eustatius, where, says he, "their cargoes, being the most proper assortments, are instantly bought up by the American agents."⁸ Yorke writes to Lord Suffolk, the secretary of state, later in the same month, that

¹ Colenbrander, *De Patriottentijd*, I. 115; *Groot Placcaet Boeck*, IX. 107. The prohibition was for six months; August 18 it was extended for a year. There are translations of these, and of a similar decree of the King of Denmark, in Force, fourth ser., II. 277; III. 156, 942.

² Force, *American Archives*, fourth ser., I. 881; for six months, extended in April, 1775, *ibid.*, II. 277.

³ Yorke to Suffolk, August 5, 26, 1774 (Bancroft MSS.); Dartmouth to Colden, September 7, *N. Y. Col. Docs.*, VIII. 487.

⁴ Yorke to Suffolk, December 30, 1774 (Bancroft MSS.).

⁵ Pearson to Stephens, April 8, 1775, Yorke Papers, *ibid.*

⁶ See also *Hist. MSS. Comm. Reports*, XIV. 10: 334; *Md. Archives*, XI. 156; *Remembrancer*, 1776, II. 32; Colenbrander, I. 115.

⁷ *E. g.*, Washington's *Writings*, ed. Ford, III. 387, 430. *Journals of Congress*, I. 158.

⁸ Yorke Corr., Sparks MSS., March 6, 1776.

the high price of powder is proving a great temptation to the Dutch merchants. Two ships loaded with it were now in the Texel. They were bound for St. Eustatius and were within the letter of the law, but as they sailed for the house of Crommelin, who had been great traders to North America, he has no doubt of their destination, and urges the secretary of state to see to it that a close watch for these contraband cargoes be kept in the West Indies.¹ In April the profit on gunpowder at the island is reported as one hundred and twenty per cent.² Lord Suffolk writes to the ambassador that Isaac van Dam, a merchant of the island, is the principal agent of correspondence with the rebels, and that recently, having procured from a trader in Martinique and from a smuggling vessel belonging to Antigua more than 4,000 pounds of powder, he had forwarded it to North Carolina in a Virginian vessel. Afterward he had sent £2,000 to France to buy more powder, to be sent out to North America by way of his island. A little later Van Dam is reported as having said, before his death, that he had carried on this trade on behalf of Frenchmen.³ The Rotterdam merchant already mentioned reports to Lord Suffolk that the last powder sent out, though it cost in Holland but forty or forty-two florins a hundredweight, brought 240 florins a hundredweight at the island; that it is sent disguised in tea-chests, rice barrels, and the like; and that, according to what he hears, eighteen Dutch ships had already gone out this year (this was in May) with powder and ammunition for the American market.⁴ Harrison sends 6,000 pounds from Martinique, and then slips over to St. Eustatius and sends 14,100 pounds more. Ten thousand pounds go to Charleston, ten thousand more to Philadelphia.⁵ Later a single vessel is reported as taking out 49,000 pounds.⁶

Evidently no inconsiderable portion of the powder which the American army shot away, to more or less purpose, in this memorable year 1776, came into its hands in the devious way which has been indicated. In short, Yorke writes to William Eden in this same month of May, St. Eustatius is the rendezvous of everything and everybody meant to be clandestinely conveyed to America. It is easy to get oneself carried thither, and military adventurers of all nations have congregated at the island.⁷ He also mentions

¹ *Ibid.*, March 22, 1776.

² *Ibid.*, April 22.

³ *Ibid.* (and Bancroft MSS.), April 12, May 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, May 14.

⁵ *Md. Archives*, XI. 494; XII. 171, 268, 332, 423; Force, *Archives*, fourth ser., VI. 612, 905; fifth ser., I. 1025; II. 965; III. 513.

⁶ Yorke Corr., Sparks and Bancroft MSS., August 2, 1776.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1776; *Md. Archives*, XII. 236; Stevens's *Facsimiles*, No. 183.

that Dr. Hugh Williamson, who had won his degree at Utrecht and was noted afterward as a member of Congress, has lately been in The Hague, inquiring as to the best means of sending goods to that favored mart.¹ Recent orders from Bordeaux for powder seemed to indicate that means had been found to elude the French ordinances on the subject, as well as those of the Dutch. But Holland, and especially Amsterdam, remained after all the chief source of supply.²

It is not to be supposed that the ambassador permitted these underhand dealings to pass unchallenged. Besides urging increased activity on the part of English cruisers (who, to say truth, were already abundantly aggressive),³ he elicited from the States General's committee of foreign affairs resolutions condemning such traffic, and remonstrated warmly to the pensionary of Holland, who he thought would do all he could.⁴ But the constitution of the Dutch Republic was incredibly complicated, and its system of legislation and execution was so cumbersome and dilatory that hardly by anything short of miracle was it possible to get anything done. Moreover, while most people, he thought, condemned the trade, large numbers were interested in it, the great city of Amsterdam especially so; and Van Berckel, the pensionary of Amsterdam, a statesman of great influence, constantly exerted himself to thwart the ambassador of Great Britain.⁵

The Dutch prohibitions, such as they were, expired in the autumn. The British government, not to be satisfied with a bare renewal, sent a memorial of protest to the States General, and it was supported by the stadholder, the Prince of Orange, nephew of King George and head of the British party.⁶ The States General issued a proclamation forbidding, under the same penalties as before, for one year from October 10, 1776, the exportation of warlike stores or ammunition to the revolted colonies, or in British ships to any place.⁷ But that no great things were expected from this decree, or achieved by it, is evident from Suffolk's suggestion, soon after its passage, that no larger amount of military stores be allowed to be sent to the Dutch West Indies than the average annual export in years before the war, that this amount be consigned to the

¹ Yorke Corr., Sparks and Bancroft MSS., May 31, June 28, 1776.

² Yorke Corr., Sparks MSS., August 9, September 3, October 18, 1776.

³ *Ibid.*, March 6, 22, 1776 (Sparks), April 16 (Bancroft); see the curious episode narrated in *Ibid. Archives*, XI. 83.

⁴ August 2, October 21, 1776.

⁵ August 29.

⁶ Suffolk to Yorke, September 13; Yorke to Suffolk, September 29, October 1, 11; Colenbrander, I. 120.

⁷ *Groot Placcaet Boeck*, IX. 108.

Dutch colonial governments, and that they be compelled to return an account of its expenditure ; or from the suggestion which Yorke makes to Eden, that since the Dutch make so bad a use of the gunpowder they manufacture, they might be told that, if they continue, orders shall be sent to Bengal not to let them bring home any saltpeter.¹ Yorke writes in a tone of constant exasperation. The trade goes on, mostly in ships lightly armed, with twelve or fourteen guns and from eighteen to twenty-four men and boys, just enough to gain the favor of the underwriters, for they could beat off a small privateer, though not the least of the British sloops. His only satisfaction is in reporting at intervals that the trade is slackening, either because of the activity of the British cruisers in the neighborhood of the island, or because the Amsterdammers have overstocked it, or because of "the glad tidings from Long Island."²

But these satisfactions were short-lived. Some months after, for instance, a British admiral reports that one of his captains has stopped a Dutch ship sailing home from the island to Flushing, with 1,750 barrels of gunpowder. Its master admitted that he had sold at the island 3,000 barrels of powder and 750 stands of arms complete, with bayonets and cartouche-boxes ; but declared that after waiting seven months to sell the rest he was now taking it home. It appeared probable, however, that he was going out beyond the range of the British cruisers to meet a vessel to which he would transfer his remaining stores, and which would take them to the rebels. Indeed the British captain thinks that he has found the very vessel, one sailing in the neighborhood without cargo, whose occupants said that they were cruising for pleasure, fishing and shooting, and selling the surplus of their catch.³

The governor of the island, thought by the English to favor the smugglers, was replaced in the middle of the year by the secretary, Johannes de Graaff ; but the new governor did no better. The port was opened without reserve to American ships.⁴ Van Bibber writes to the Maryland council of safety November 5, 1776, urging them to send all their vessels to St. Eustatius rather than to any other island, "as the Dutch have discover'd that their laws when put in force must ruin their Merchants. I am on the best terms with His Excellency the Governour and have his word and Promise relative

¹ Suffolk to Yorke, October 22, 1776 ; Yorke to Eden, October 25.

² Yorke to Suffolk, May 21, October 22, November 15, December 24, 27, 1776, July 4, 1777 ; Paul Wentworth to Suffolk, Stevens's *Facsimiles*, No. 704.

³ Vice-Admiral Young to Philip Stephens, secretary of the admiralty, Antigua, August 8, 1777, Yorke Corr., Sparks MSS.

⁴ Captain Colpoys to Young, Basseterre, November 27, *ibid.*

to some particulars that gives me great Satisfaction and puts much in our powers. I was not so happy some time agoe, and every bad consequence to apprehend on our new Governour's taking the Command, but we are as well fixed with him now as we were with the former." Two weeks later he writes: "Our Flag flys current every day in the road. The Merchants here are always complaining of Government untill they would give as much Protection and Indulgence here to us as the French and Spaniards do. . . . The Governour is daily expressing the greatest desire and Intention to protect a trade with us here. Indeed they begin to discover their Mistake and are now very jealous of the French's running away with all their trade."¹

Between the dates of these two letters an event occurred which raised British exasperation to the highest point. On the sixteenth of November, 1776, a vessel of the infant Continental navy, the *Andrew Doria*, Captain Isaiah Robinson, flying the flag of thirteen stripes, dropped anchor in the road of St. Eustatius and saluted Fort Orange with eleven guns; and the salute was returned. This has been claimed as the first occasion on which the American flag was saluted in a foreign port.² But a letter written from the Danish island of St. Croix to Vice-Admiral Young, on October 27 preceding, after mentioning the departure of an unnamed American schooner with a small cargo of powder two days before, adds: "But my astonishment was great to find such a Commerce countenanced by Government here. The Vessel went out under American Colours, saluted the Fort and had the compliment returned the same as if she had been an English or Danish ship."³

But the incident at St. Eustatius was more conspicuous. The *Andrew Doria* was a Continental vessel. Van Bibber reported that her commander was "most graciously received by his Honour and all Ranks of People. Its esteemed here by the first Gentlemen a favour and Honour to be Introduced to Capt. Robertson. All American Vessells here now wear the Congress Colours. Tories sneak and shrink before the Honest and Brave Americans here."⁴ Whatever effect may have been produced on Dutchmen or on

¹ *Md. Archives*, XII. 423, 456; Force, *Archives*, fifth ser., II. 180; III. 513, 759.

² Bancroft, IX. 293; a pamphlet by Hon. B. F. Prescott, secretary of state of New Hampshire, entitled *The Stars and Stripes: The Flag of the United States of America; When, Where and by Whom was it first Saluted?* (Concord, 1876); an article by Rev. Dr. W. E. Griffis, "Where our Flag was first Saluted," in the *New England Magazine*, n.s., VIII. 576 (1893).

³ Letter of October 27, Bancroft MSS.; it was apparently written by a Mr. Kelly and was enclosed in a letter of March 14, 1777, from Lord George Germain to Suffolk, *ibid.*

⁴ *Md. Archives*, XII. 456; Force, *Archives*, fifth ser., III. 759.

Tories by the arrival and the reception of the *Andrew Doria*, it roused the president of St. Christopher to vivid indignation. Summing up in one angry remonstrance the various violations of neutrality which he had observed from his neighboring island, and commenting with especial severity upon the salute, he sent the document solemnly to De Graaff by the hand of a member of his council. At the same time he sent indignant representations to the secretary of state in London, fortified by affidavits, some of which are curious. One of them is from a Barbadian student at Princeton, John Trottman, who during a vacation at Philadelphia, while walking late one evening with a fellow-student, was seized by a press-gang, hurried on board the *Andrew Doria*, and carried away to St. Eustatius. Another was from one James Fraser, gentleman, who testified with great clearness as to the lowering of the Dutch flag on the fort, the salute with nine guns in response to the eleven fired by the American brigantine, and the common talk that this had been done by the governor's order.¹ President Greathead also commented severely on the open encouragement and protection which the rebels received at the Dutch island, the constant equipping and fitting-out of privateers to prey on British commerce, and especially on the incident of the sloop *Baltimore Hero*, said to be half-owned by Abraham van Bibber, and flying the flag of the Continental Congress, which on November 21, almost within range of the guns of Fort Orange, had taken a British brigantine and then returned to the road of St. Eustatius, with flag flying, and there received every sign of aid and protection.²

But, after all, the greatest offense was the salute, or, as Lord Suffolk put it, the honor paid to a rebel brigantine carrying the flag

¹ The chief source of information on the episode, and on De Graaff's conduct generally, is a voluminous Dutch "blue book" of 1779, which Dr. Griffis has been so kind as to lend to me, and which is entitled *Missive van Repraesentant en Bewindhebberen der Westindische Compagnie, met eene Deductie en Bylaagen van den Commandeur de Graaf op St. Eustatius tot sijne Verantwoording, etc.* It contains De Graaff's defense, a report to the States General by a committee of the West India Company appointed to consider it, and more than a hundred and fifty pertinent documents. Several of the more important of these had been printed in the *Nederlandsche Jaerboeken* for 1777, and translations of these are given in Mr. Prescott's pamphlet, already mentioned. In this will be found, accordingly, versions of Greathead's letter of December 17, 1776, to Governor de Graaff, the latter's reply of December 23, a second letter from Greathead, December 26, the affidavits of Trottman and Fraser, and Greathead's letter of December 31 to Lord George Germain.

² *Missive en Deductie*, 98-102. Yet when an American ship at St. Eustatius was seized by two of her crew while her captain was ashore, and was given up within sight of the island to a British cruiser, which took her to Nevis and sold her, Yorke remarks (to Suffolk, April 19, 1776) that "it is a little singular that the governor should presume to complain of it" (Sparks MSS.). We have the same story from the American captain's point of view in *Md. Archives*, XI. 83.

of the rebel Congress, and the governor's insolence and folly in replying to the remonstrance of the president of St. Christopher that he is "far from betraying any partiality between Great Britain and her North American colonies."¹ Such conduct from the representative of a state allied to Great Britain by several treaties was not to be overlooked. The secretary of state sent over to Sir Joseph Yorke a memorial which was forthwith presented to the States General, but which was conceived in a peremptory style not usual in the mutual communications of friendly states. After recounting in warm terms Governor de Graaff's connivance at the illicit trade and at the fitting-out of privateers, and the final outrage of returning an American salute, the minister declares that he is ordered "to expressly demand of your High Mightinesses a formal disavowal of the salute by Fort Orange, at St. Eustatia, to the rebel ship, the dismissal and immediate recall of Governor Van Graaf, and to declare further, on the part of His Majesty, that until that satisfaction is given they are not to expect that His Majesty will suffer himself to be amused by mere assurances, or that he will delay one instant to take such measures as he shall think due to the interests and dignity of his crown."²

In fact, the measures deemed appropriate had already been taken. Six days before the memorial had been presented at The Hague the lords of the admiralty had been instructed³ to order the commander-in-chief on the Leeward Islands station to post cruisers off the road of St. Eustatius, search all Dutch ships for arms, ammunition, clothing, or materials for clothing, and send those ships which were found to contain such things into some port of the Leeward Islands, there to be detained till further orders; and these injunctions were maintained for six weeks.⁴

But the Dutch Republic, with the party of Amsterdam and the party of Orange, the French party and that of England, straining its unwieldy governmental machinery in opposite directions, was in no condition to resent effectively the tone of English memorials. Their reply⁵ disavows their governor's actions in so far as they might seem to imply a recognition of American independence, and

¹ Suffolk to Yorke, February 14, 1777 (Sparks MSS.).

² The memorial, presented February 21, 1777, is printed in Hansard, XXI. 1079, in the *Annual Register* for 1777, p. 289; and in the *Remembrancer* for the same year, p. 92. See the comments of Thomas Townshend in Hansard, XXI. 1086. Mr. Colenbrander says that the papers of the Public Record Office show that these menacing words were penned by the British government, not by Yorke himself as was thought at the time.

³ Suffolk to the lords of the admiralty, February 15; Yorke Corr., Sparks MSS.

⁴ Suffolk to the lords of the admiralty, March 29, 1777, recalling the previous instructions and ordering that the Dutch ships which had been detained be restored.

⁵ *Annual Register*, 1777, p. 291; *Remembrancer*, 1777, p. 93.

they required him to come home and explain his conduct. He was more than a year in coming, pleading age, the fear of seasickness, the recent illness of his family and himself;¹ and meanwhile the salutes went on.² The other provinces were persuaded to put pressure upon Holland.³ Rear-Admiral Count Bylandt, sent out as commander-in-chief of a convoying squadron, and temporarily superseding De Graaff in matters of marine, watched more closely over the execution of the neutrality laws—though Lord Macartney, governor of Grenada, thought that “To see a man of Count Bylandt’s Birth and Quality receive a board his Flag Ship the Masters of Rebel Privateers with all the attention and civility due to their equals in regular service excites one’s pity and contempt.”⁴ St. Eustatius proved very useful to the Windward Islands in a time of scarcity; and the secretary of state notified the ambassador that the British would not take any more Dutch ships unless they had naval or warlike stores on board.⁵

In July, 1778, De Graaff at last reached home. Called upon to defend his whole course as governor, so far as it related to the North American colonies, he presented in February a verbose *apologia pro vita sua*, in which he endeavored to clear himself of all the accusations raised by Greathead and Yorke. He declared that he had never connived at trade in munitions of war; that the *Baltimore Hero* had not been fitted out at the island, but by the council in Maryland; that her prize was not made within the range of his guns, but much nearer to St. Christopher; that the salute of the *Andrew Doria* had, by his orders, been returned with two less guns than she fired, that this was the usual return-salute to merchant vessels, and implied no recognition of American independence; that on accusation by Vice-Admiral Young against Van Bibber, as concerned in fitting out privateers, he had placed the latter under civil arrest, but that he had escaped before the arrival of a demand backed by proper affidavits; that it had been his custom to require incoming American vessels to give bonds for due observance of neutrality while in the port; that he had compelled all persons on the island possessing gunpowder to take oath that they would not export it

¹ Yorke to Suffolk, September 2, October 7, 1777, January 13, 1778; *Missive en Deductie*, 3-5; Wentworth to Suffolk, September 2, 1777, in Stevens’s *Facsimiles*, No. 191.

² Yorke to Eden, July 4, 1777.

³ Yorke to Suffolk, November 7, 1777.

⁴ *Id.*, August 25, 1778; De Jonge, *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Zeewezen*, IV. 383; *Missive en Deductie*, 79; Suffolk to Yorke, August 28, 1778, and Macartney to Germain, April 10, 1779 (Bancroft MSS.).

⁵ Burke, in Hansard, XXII. 233; petition of the West India planters and merchants, in *Gazette de Leyde*, April 27, 1781, p. 3; Suffolk to Yorke, September 29, 1778.

to North America; and that he had appointed a customs clerk visitor of ships in order to find arms if any were illegally carried.¹ A committee of the directors of the West India Company, appointed to hear his defense, reported to the States General that it was perfectly satisfactory, and that the facts which he had adduced showed that there was ground of complaint rather against the British commanders for their conduct toward the Dutch settlements and subjects in the West Indies than against the latter.² De Graaff went out again as governor, and conducted himself so acceptably to the Americans that two of their privateers were named after him and his lady;³ and his portrait, presented sixty years afterward by an American citizen grateful for the "first salute," hangs in the New Hampshire state-house.⁴ Of his defense no more need now be said than that an observance of neutrality which gave to the one belligerent such absolute contentment and to the other such unqualified dissatisfaction can hardly have been perfect.

Accordingly, when Sir George Rodney, sent out to command on the Leeward Islands station, arrived in the West Indies in the spring of 1780, the situation was still exceedingly strained. Rodney declared with conviction that after his ineffectual fight with Guichen off Martinique on April 17, 1780, two vessels loaded with cordage and naval stores and filled with carpenters went out from St. Eustatius, joined the shattered French fleet under Barbuda, and gave such assistance as enabled eight of their vessels, which must otherwise have borne away for St. Domingo, to keep company with their fleet.⁵ He seems at that time to have conceived a deep feeling of hostility against the island. "This rock," he afterward declared, "of only six miles in length and three in breadth, has done England more harm than all the arms of her most potent enemies, and alone supported the infamous American rebellion."⁶ In August, after he had sailed to New York, Captain Robinson, one of his offi-

¹ *Missive en Deductie*. His defense fills pp. 3-98, his appendix of documents pp. 99-344.

² *Ibid.*, I, 2. See also the Dutch counter-manifesto of March 12, 1781, in Wharton, *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence*, IV. 307.

³ Mundy's *Life and Correspondence of Lord Rodney*, II. 46; Stevens, *Facsimiles*, No. 732, anonymous letter to Eden, Philadelphia, September 1, 1780: "This day arrived the Ship call'd Governor De Graff Cap^t Lyle of this Port from St. Eustatias."

⁴ The correspondence regarding it (1837) is in Mr. Prescott's pamphlet; it was copied in Surinam from a painting owned there by De Graaff's grandson.

⁵ Mundy, II. 30; Colenbrander, I. 120, 124. Mr. Colenbrander prints in an appendix, I. 383, a characteristic letter of advice written by Frederick the Great to his niece, the Princess of Orange, May 31, 1779, in which he says, "Il faut . . . favoriser les François dans les bagatelles, comme de bien approvisionner votre île de St. Eustache, pour leur rendre de là les comestibles dont ils peuvent avoir besoin en Amérique."

⁶ Rodney to Lady Rodney, Mundy, II. 97.

cers, seized several American vessels under the very guns of the fort on the Dutch part of the little island of St. Martin, and threatened to burn fort and town if any resistance were made.¹ De Graaff represented that the loss would be great if the English persisted in the new stringency which Rodney seems to have introduced; and private letters from St. Eustatius said that numbers of the Americans settled there had left the place for fear of being seized, the governor declaring that he could not protect them.² Then came the great hurricane of October, 1780, which destroyed between four and five thousand people and nearly if not quite all the dwelling-houses in the town.³

But the time had now come when the Dutch West Indies were to be drawn, even more intimately than hitherto, into the widening circle of the European war. The feeling between England and Holland, owing to the position of the Dutch as the chief neutral carriers during the war which England was waging against France, Spain, and the United States, and to the inevitable disputes as to the doctrine that "free ships make free goods"—a doctrine here complicated by treaty stipulations between the two states—was rapidly growing worse and worse. At the same time the Armed Neutrality of 1780 was arraying the northern powers of Europe in diplomatic hostility against England. The Netherlands government seemed likely to accede to it. It was feared that, if a breach with the Dutch came, it would come on a ground that would compel the northern powers to make common cause with them and enlarge to the most fatal completeness the circle of England's foes. At this juncture the capture of Henry Laurens and the discovery among his papers of a projected Dutch-American treaty afforded a pretext for forcing hostilities. The paper was but a draft, unexecuted and unauthorized; but it was signed by an agent of the Continental Congress and an agent of the hated city of Amsterdam. Two peremptory memorials were presented to the States General by Sir Joseph Yorke, demanding a formal disavowal of the conduct of the magistrates of Amsterdam, "a prompt satisfaction, proportioned to the offence, and an exemplary punishment on the pensionary Van Berkel and his accomplices, as disturbers of the public

¹ Yorke to Lord Stormont, October 6, 1780; correspondence of the States General, in Sparks MSS., CIII.; their resolutions of November 16, in *Annual Register*, 1780, pp. 374, 375; their counter-manifesto of March 12, 1781, *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 308; *Authentic Rebel Papers*, 22; *Writings of James Madison*, I. 68.

² Yorke to Stormont, October 13, 1780; Stevens, *Facsimiles*, No. 732; John Adams thought that the amount of American property remaining on the island at the time of its capture was not great; *Correspondence of the late President Adams*, 422.

³ *London Chronicle* of January 6-9, 1781, pp. 31, 32; *Annual Register* for 1780, p. 298.

peace and violators of the law of nations.”¹ So threatening was his tone that insurance to St. Eustatius at once rose to twenty or twenty-five per cent.²

The disavowal was promptly forthcoming. But under the decentralizing Dutch constitution it was even more difficult for the States General to find means of punishing the magistrates of a particular city, and that the most powerful, than it is for the government of the United States to inflict punishment for the murder of Italians in New Orleans. Their reply to the demand for satisfaction and punishment was deemed so dilatory and evasive that the British ambassador was ordered to quit The Hague, and on December 20, 1780, his government, justifying itself in a bold manifesto, declared war against the Netherlands.³ So rich a nation, with a constitution so little adapted to rapid and effective preparation for war, afforded an easy prey; before Yorke had left the The Hague two hundred Dutch ships had been seized, with cargoes valued at fifteen million florins.⁴

But even before he had presented his first memorial he had directed the attention of the secretary of state to the rich opportunity afforded by the Dutch colonies in America. On November 7 he wrote to Lord Stormont: “But it is in the West Indies that the most immediate reprisal might be made, and which would affect them the most, because it is the golden mine of the moment, and in the working of which the greatest numbers are actually employed. It is sufficient to cast an eye upon the Custom House lists of the Rebel Ports in North America, to see what is carrying on through St. Eustatius, Curaçao and other Dutch settlements, but above all the former. What the defence of that place is, anybody can tell who has ever been at St. Kitts; and the panic the seizing of the Rebel ships at St. Martin’s struck those of St. Eustatius with, proves sufficiently what the inhabitants themselves thought of it. As these places, but St. Eustatius in particular, are the channels of correspondence and connection with North America, the conduct of

¹ Memorials of November 10 and December 12, 1780, in *Annual Register* of that year, pp. 373, 375; Hansard, XXI. 978, 979; *Remembrancer*, X. 333.

² Adams, *Works*, VII. 329.

³ Manifesto in *Annual Register*, p. 376; Hansard, XXI. 968; *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 219. Counter-manifesto of the States General, March 12, 1781, *Gazette de Leyde* of March 20; translated in *Annual Register*, 1781, p. 293, and *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 306.

⁴ Colenbrander, *De Patriottentijd*, I. 153, says that in 1778 Great Britain had, of ships of sixty guns and more (then the essential instruments of naval warfare), 122, France 63, Spain 62, the Netherlands 11. See also p. 191 *ibid.* As late as May 17, 1781, a Dutch captain, meeting in the North Atlantic three homeward-bound ships of the Dutch West India Company, gave them their first intimation of the existence of war with England; *Gazette de Leyde*, June 29, p. 4.

Amsterdam upon the present occasion, after the proofs produced of its treachery, seems to justify the taking possession of it as a dépôt, declaring not to mean to keep it, or prevent the lawful trade between that place and the mother country, but only to cut off the intercourse between Amsterdam and His Majesty's enemies and rebellious subjects, till satisfaction is given for the past, and security for the future." He added that he had heard that ten or eleven Dutch men-of-war were to sail for the West Indies in two or three weeks, so that it would be best to act soon, in order, as he naïvely says, to avoid the charge of aggression ("if that is worthy consideration in matters of such magnitude") or the necessity of an attack on the ships of the States General.¹

The ambassador's hint was not lost upon the secretary. The portion of his letter relating to St. Eustatius was forthwith transmitted to the admiralty for their guidance.² On the fifth of December Stormont informs Yorke that he is preparing "to send secret orders to seize the Dutch settlements in the West Indies."³ On December 20, the same day on which war was declared, orders were sent to Rodney and to Major-General Vaughan, commander-in-chief of the land forces in the West Indies, to make immediate conquest of the Dutch islands, beginning with St. Eustatius and St. Martin.⁴ How great an importance was attached to the matter may be seen from the declarations of Lord Stormont in the House of Lords a few weeks later, during the debate on the Dutch war. After dwelling upon the enormities of the illicit trade, he said that the Dutch had supplied the rebels with the means of continuing their resistance till France, and afterwards Spain, took a public part in the quarrel, and he declared that "he was persuaded, upon the best information, that we should never have been in our present situation, were it our good fortune that St. Eustatia had been destroyed or sunk in the ocean."⁵ The confident statement of Lord George

¹ Yorke to Stormont, November 7, 1780; Bancroft and Sparks MSS. This letter is printed by Colenbrander in an appendix, I. 388, 389. The British government had asked Yorke for suggestions; *ibid.*, 190.

² Bancroft MSS.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Instructions of the lords of the admiralty, in Mundy, II. 6; in Brown, *Reports of Cases in Parliament*, II. 424; and in *Letters from Sir George Brydges, now Lord, Rodney to his Majesty's Ministers, etc., relative to the Capture of St. Eustatius and its Dependencies*, 1789, p. 5. As most of the letters given in this book (of which there was an earlier and less complete edition, 1787, privately printed and very rare,—not in Sabin) are reprinted in Mundy's *Rodney*, and as the latter is much more accessible, I shall refer to the former only for letters which are not to be found in Mundy, or for passages which Mundy, who seems to have taken considerable liberties with his texts, gives in a different form.

⁵ Hansard, XXI. 1004, January 25, 1781. The *Gazette de Leyde* of March 23, p. 7, comments on the obvious connection between these expressions of the secretary of state and the subsequent events.

Germain, that the town had reached such a state of commercial importance that the annual rent of its houses and warehouses amounted to a million sterling,¹ would hardly seem credible were it not supported by Rodney's declaration that the lower town, a range of storehouses about a mile and a quarter in length, had been "let at the enormous sum of twelve hundred thousand pounds per annum."²

Rodney had left Sandy Hook in the middle of November, and arrived at Barbados on December 6.³ During his absence and after his return the control of neutral commerce was vigilantly maintained. In October an English privateer, after a half-hour's fight, took an American vessel out of the road of St. Eustatius.⁴ Early in January three others seized ten vessels laden with sugar and coffee and cotton, which were sailing from the French islands to St. Eustatius and St. Croix under the convoy of a Danish frigate.⁵ In the middle of the month Admiral Rodney made his ineffectual attack on St. Vincent. Before the year ended he was joined by Rear-Admiral Sir Samuel Hood with large reinforcements. At Barbados, on January 27, he received the declaration of war and his secret orders. Embarking the troops under Vaughan, he sailed from St. Lucia on the thirtieth. After a feint at Martinique, he appeared before St. Eustatius on February 3 and demanded the instant surrender of the island and all that it contained.⁶

The blow, as Rodney said, "was as sudden as a clap of thunder," and wholly unexpected. A Dutch frigate, which had arrived but two days before, had brought no news of war. As a naval exploit the capture has no interest. There was no possibility of defense. The fortifications were such as Lord Stormont had described. The garrison numbered only fifty or sixty men.⁷ The naval force in the harbor consisted of the frigate already mentioned, of thirty-eight guns, and five smaller American vessels, of from twelve to

¹ Hansard, XXII. 246, House of Commons, May 14.

² Mundy, II. 94, 95; *Historical MSS. Commission Reports*, IX. 3 : 112.

³ Mundy, I. 447, 448.

⁴ Letter of October 31, 1780, from St. Eustatius, in *Gazette de Leyde*, February 27, 1781, p. 8.

⁵ *Gazette de Leyde*, March 13, p. 5; April 17, p. 1.

⁶ Rodney's reports to the admiralty and the secretary of state, and his letter to Lady Rodney are given in Mundy, II. 9-27. Some additional particulars respecting the capture may be obtained from Vaughan's reports, which (with Rodney's) are printed in the *London Chronicle* of March 13-15, p. 249. The *Gazette de Leyde* of May 15, pp. 5, 6, and the *Nederlandsche Jaerboeken*, 1781, pp. 807-813, present a sort of diary of the events from February 3 to February 22, kept by a Dutch supercargo at St. Eustatius. Count Bylandt's report to the stadholder, February 6, is in the *Gazette* of March 27, p. 8, and in the *Jaerboek* at p. 787. See also the *Annual Register* of 1781, pp. 101, 102, and De Jonge, IV. 458-468.

⁷ Burke, in Hansard, XXII. 221, 772.

twenty-six. It would seem that a naval force of fifteen ships of the line and several frigates, accompanied by 3,000 land troops, was an ample one with which to reduce a place so defended. At all events, Governor De Graaff thought so; and, being given an hour in which to surrender unconditionally, he did so. Count Frederik van Bylandt, commanding the frigate, demanded for his honor's sake that there should be some firing. After two broadsides in return, he also surrendered. The Americans on the island made an offer to the governor to defend it, and a large body of American sailors retired to the interior and made a show of resistance; but hunger and Vaughan's troops soon compelled them also to surrender at discretion.¹ St. Martin and Saba presently yielded to a detachment of the British forces.² Learning that a rich convoy of twenty-three merchant vessels,³ under the protection of a sixty-gun Dutch ship, had sailed homeward from the island about thirty-six hours before his arrival, Rodney sent after it another detachment, and the whole convoy was captured after a brief engagement, in which the Dutch rear-admiral was killed—the first Netherlander slain in the war.⁴ With stratagem perhaps not illegal but certainly not glorious, the Dutch flag was kept flying over the town and fort, in order that Dutch, French, Spanish, and American vessels, ignorant of the capture and perhaps of the war, might be decoyed into the roadstead and seized as a part of the spoils.⁵

But if the capture of St. Eustatius was not glorious, undoubtedly it was lucrative. Rodney himself was surprised at the magnitude of the spoil. "The riches of St. Eustatius," he wrote to his wife, "are beyond all comprehension; there were one hundred and thirty sail of ships in the road," besides the war-vessels. The convoy which had been overtaken by his subordinates was valued at more than half a million pounds sterling. "All the magazines and store-houses are filled, and even the beach covered with tobacco and sugar." A convoy from Guadeloupe was brought in. There was scarcely a night without an additional American capture. March 26 the admiral reports, "Upwards of fifty American vessels, loaded with tobacco, have been taken since the capture of this island;" and the letters found on board proved that their whole

¹ Letter in *London Chronicle* of March 24–27, p. 292.

² February 5, according to the documents in the *London Chronicle*, March 13–15, p. 250; but mentioned in Rodney's despatch of February 4, Mundy, II. 12.

³ An inventory of the cargo is in *Nederl. Jaerboeken*, 1781, p. 1228.

⁴ Report of Captain van Halm to the stadholder, *Nederl. Jaerboeken*, pp. 1392–1394; also pp. 789, 792.

⁵ See the *Gazette de Leyde*, April 27, 1781, for the severe comments of the *Gaceta de Madrid*. The Dutch flag was kept flying more than a month after the surrender; letter of March 4 from St. Eustatius in the *Gazette de Leyde* of May 8, p. 3.

outfits, everything save hulls and masts, had been obtained through St. Eustatius. The island, said Lord George Germain, was a vast magazine of military stores of all kinds. Several thousand tons of cordage had been found, though Rodney complained that he had been unable to procure any for his needs, and had been told that there was none to be had. Altogether, the value of the capture was estimated by sober authorities at more than three million pounds sterling. Besides the other inhabitants of all nations more than two thousand American merchants and seamen were secured.¹ It was a pardonable exaggeration if the admiral, in the flush of victory, wrote to his wife that "There never was a more important stroke made against any state whatever."²

How profound an impression the disaster made upon public opinion in Holland may be seen from what John Adams, an eyewitness, reports to Secretary Livingston: "You can have no idea, sir, no man who was not upon the spot can have any idea, of the gloom and terror that was spread by this event. The creatures of the court openly rejoiced in this, and threatened, some of them in the most impudent terms. I had certain information, that some of them talked high of their expectations of popular insurrections against the burgomasters of Amsterdam and M. Van Berckel; and did Mr. Adams the honor to mention him as one that was to be hanged by the mob in such company."³ In England, on the other hand, there was great exultation. The guns of the Tower were fired, and the government stocks rose one and a half per cent.⁴ George Selwyn noted the joy which prevailed at White's.⁵ "Your express," wrote Lady Rodney, "arrived on the morning of the 13th (March). My house has been like a fair from that time till this. Every friend, every acquaintance came. I went to the drawing-room on Thursday following. It was more crowded than on a birthday; and the spirits which every one was in was enlivening to a degree, and the attention and notice I received from their Majesties were sufficient to turn my poor brain. . . . This glorious news has been a thun-

¹ Mundy, II. 11, 15, 18, 19, 21, 67, 77; Hansard, XXII. 244, 245; *Annual Register*, 1781, p. 102; *Letters from Sir George Rodney*, p. 161. Some of the intercepted letters were presently printed in a pamphlet entitled *Authentic Rebel Papers seized at St. Eustatius*, 1781; but though relied upon by their editor (shortly before Yorktown) to prove the inability of America to continue the contest, they are of slight importance; and indeed the first and longest of them bears marks of spuriousness. Their genuineness was questioned by a contemporary reviewer in the *Monthly Review*, LXV. 382. Burke offered to prove that the alleged scarcity of cordage had been real, Hansard, XXII. 776, 777; but the evidence seems to point the other way.

² Mundy, II. 25.

³ Adams's *Works*, VII. 417, 523.

⁴ *London Chronicle*, March 10-13, 1781, p. 248.

⁵ *Historical MSS. Commission Reports*, XV. 6: 472.

derbolt to the opposition, very few of whom appeared in the House of Commons. Negotiations towards peace had been talked of for some time before its arrival, and it cannot fail to produce a favourable effect upon them.”¹ Rodney was raised to the peerage, and a pension of two thousand pounds per annum was bestowed upon him.²

It next remained to be seen what the admiral, and the general who was associated with him in the command, would do with their great prize; and indeed this is the most instructive portion of the story. Of the temper in which he approached his task Rodney has left no doubt. “A nest of vipers,” he called the island, “a nest of villains; they deserve scourging, and they shall be scourged.” “This island has long been an asylum for men guilty of every crime, and a receptacle for the outcast of every nation; men who will make no scruple to propagate every falsehood their debased minds can invent.” “We thought that this nest of smugglers, adventurers, betrayers of their country, and rebels to their king, had no right to expect a capitulation, or to be treated as a respectable people; their atrocious deeds deserve none, and they ought to have known that the just vengeance of an injured empire, though slow, is sure.” He hoped to leave the island, “instead of the greatest emporium upon earth, a mere desert, and only known by report.” His exasperation was greatest against the British merchants of the island, and especially against those who, for the better prosecution of the illicit trade, had made themselves Dutch burghers.³ Indeed, many passages in his correspondence show that he had formed a low opinion of the rectitude and patriotism of most of the West Indian subjects of the English crown—a turn of mind which, ill concealed, was destined to react unfavorably on the success of the British naval operations in the months succeeding. Whether the admiral was from the beginning moved to additional severity by eagerness for personal gain is more doubtful. On the one hand his earliest letters uniformly declare that all is the King’s; that he does not look upon himself as entitled to a sixpence.⁴ On the other hand his pecuniary embarrassments are a matter of history; it is not three days before

¹ Mundy, II. 51.

² Mundy, II. 62; *Letters of Sir George Rodney*, p. 100*.

³ Mundy, II. 13, 97; *Letters of Sir George Rodney*, 29, 84, 85, 98. An amusing illustration of the possibilities of British trade may be derived from the story told in the *Nederlandsche Jaerboeken*, 1781, p. 791, that Hood, who had missed twelve large merchantmen from his convoy as he neared the West Indies, had found them in the road of St. Eustatius when the island was captured, busily engaged in transferring their cargoes to American vessels. Also in Hannay, *Letters of Sir Samuel Hood*, p. xxiii, from Beatson.

⁴ Mundy, II. 13, 16; *Letters*, 94*, 98* (February 4, 7).

he conveys a decided hint to the admiralty under the form of a request that "if his Majesty is graciously pleased to bestow any part of" the spoil "between the navy and army, he will dictate in what manner his gracious bounty may be bestowed, that all altercations and disagreements may be prevented between" the two services; and various passages in his letters to Lady Rodney betray a serious anxiety as to his debts.¹

Begun in the spirit of boundless exasperation, the measures of the British admiral were summary and sweeping. Briefly, it was decreed that all the inhabitants of St. Eustatius were to be held as prisoners of war, and all the property found there was to be confiscated to the King;—as Burke phrased it, "a general confiscation of all the property found upon the island, public and private, Dutch and British; without discrimination, without regard to friend or foe, to the subjects of neutral powers, or to the subjects of our own state; the wealth of the opulent, the goods of the merchant, the utensils of the artisan, the necessities of the poor, were seized on, and a sentence of general beggary pronounced in one moment upon a whole people."² The admiral enjoined that there should be no plundering; that neither officers nor men should go ashore from the fleet; and that none of the English inhabitants of the Leeward Islands should approach the doomed town; that all the naval stores should be sent to the government shipyards at Antigua; that the provisions designed for St. Domingo should be despatched to Jamaica; that all the goods of European origin should be sold publicly for the King; that all the rich stores of West Indian and American produce should be sent to England under convoy; and that the "lower town" should be destroyed or unroofed, and the materials sent to the devastated islands of Barbados, St. Lucia, and Antigua.³

Communication with the Windward Islands by flags of truce, grossly abused in the preceding war, was strictly forbidden.⁴ Prisoners of war were at the admiral's mercy. Samuel Curzon, who had been the local agent of Congress since the beginning of the war, and Isaac Gouverneur, Jr., who of late had been his partner,

¹ Mundy, II. 21 (February 10), 98, 139, 140.

² Hansard, XXII. 221, 222.

³ Mundy, II. 11–13, 16, 24, 30, 68, 88, 89, 92, 421; *Letters*, 94*, 97*, 98*, 108; *Gazette de Leyde*, May 8, p. 4. Probably the lower town was not actually destroyed, as we find Rodney, as late as April 21, soliciting permission to destroy it; Mundy, II. 94, 95. The secretary of state ordered the provisions to be sent to the British army in North America; *Letters*, 99; but they are said to have been conveyed to the French after Rodney's departure; Mundy, II. 423.

⁴ Mundy, II. 33, 35; *Letters*, 21, where Rodney says that in the previous war the ordinary price of a flag of truce was fifty johanneses.

were sent as prisoners of state to England, where they were committed for high treason, but released by the Rockingham ministry after a rigorous confinement of thirteen months.¹ The French merchants were treated somewhat better than the others, partly, it may be supposed, because it was impossible wholly to escape remembrance of the considerate behavior of the French at the capture of Grenada, partly because of the warm remonstrances and threats of the Marquis de Bouillé, governor of Martinique, and of Durat of Grenada. They were to be sent away in cartel vessels to Martinique and to Guadeloupe, taking with them their household furniture, plate, and linen, and their numerous domestic slaves. The governor, the Dutch, American, Bermudian, and British merchants were also to be allowed or compelled to retire, taking with them their household goods. Only the sugar-planters were to be treated with positive favor.²

In the execution of these drastic decrees much hardship was naturally caused. The secretary of the island declared that the English acted like robbers.³ The warehouses were locked; the merchants were denied permission to take inventories; all their books and papers were seized; and their cash was taken from them.⁴ A Dutch supercargo who chanced to be at the island, and who kept a sort of diary of the first three weeks after the capture, gives us a vivid picture of the searchings of portmanteaus and pockets, the digging in gardens for hidden specie, the destruction of houses, the seizing of negroes, the appropriation of riding-horses by the officers, and the daily work of shipping the goods and sending away the inhabitants in companies, nation by nation.⁵ The remonstrances of the assembly of St. Christopher, presented to Rodney by its solicitor-general, was treated with contempt.⁶

¹ Mundy, II. 39; *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 405, 624, 708; *London Chronicle*, July 24-26. Both, in 1777, called themselves Dutch subjects; *Missive en Deductie*, p. 155. A letter from Curzon to the president of Congress, dated London, May 13, 1782, and preserved at the department of state (Chapter A, No. 78, VI. 99), describes their losses and sufferings — and asks for a consulate. On Gouverneur, see also Hansard, XXII. 773, 781. A son of President Witherspoon was also among the prisoners; *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 708, 847.

² Mundy, II. 32, 44-46; correspondence with Bouillé, *ibid.*, 71-75. All the French left the island March 24, the Americans a few days later. They had been detained lest they should return to America and give warning. *Ibid.*, 69.

³ Secretary A. Le Jeune to the greffier of the States General, June 27, in *Corr. St. Gen.*, Sparks MSS., CIII. His arrival is noted in *Gazette de Leyde*, July 3, p. 4.

⁴ *Gazette de Leyde*, April 17, p. 1, May 8, p. 4; *Nederlandsche Jaerboeken*, 1781, pp. 1225-1227, 1994; Hansard, XXII. 221-223.

⁵ *Gazette de Leyde*, May 15, pp. 5, 6; *Nederlandsche Jaerboeken*, 1781, pp. 807-813.

⁶ One of the St. Christopher remonstrances is reprinted, from an island newspaper, in the *Gazette de Leyde* of May 8, p. 3; they are commented on by Burke in Hansard, XXII. 227, 228.

The hardest measure of all was meted out to the Jews. Not only were they deprived of their property and laid under sentence of banishment, but they were given but a day's notice for their departure, and were told that they were to go without their wives and children. They assembled the next day, to the number of 101. Forthwith they were confined in the weigh-house and strictly guarded. They were stripped, and the linings of their clothes ripped up in search of money. Eight thousand pounds sterling were obtained in this way. One of these Jews, from whose clothing 900 johanneses were taken, was a Newport Jew named Pollock. Having imported tea contrary to the command of the Rhode Islanders, he had been driven from the island with loss of all his property. Sir William Howe had given him the opportunity for a fresh start, on Long Island, but again the Americans had fallen upon him and despoiled him; and now for the third time he suffered loss of all his property, though this time the blow was inflicted by the agents of his own government.¹

It was inevitable that such wholesale devastation should excite the indignation of Europe, especially since most of Europe was at war with England or sympathized with her enemies. It was quickly taken up by the West India merchants in London, who held a meeting, sent a committee to interview Lord George Germain, and presented to the Crown an able but ineffectual petition.² Even the Amsterdam merchants sent over a remonstrance, though those of Rotterdam refused to sue for justice of the public enemy.³ It was also made the subject of a warm attack in the House of Commons, an attack illuminated by the genius of Edmund Burke. Upon motions for an inquiry into the conduct of the chief commanders, the whole affair was debated in May, and again in December, when Rodney and Vaughan, who were members of the House, were able to be present.⁴ Burke had no difficulty in showing that a wholesale confiscation of private property found in a captured place was contrary to the law of nations. He defied his opponents to men-

¹ Hansard, XXII. 223-226. The *Gazette de Leyde*, June 5, p. 3, gives the name of this man as Moloch, surely an unlikely name for a Hebrew. Lord George Germain asserted that the treatment of the Jews was unknown to the commanders-in-chief, but St. John declared himself ready to prove the opposite (*ibid.*, 244, 247), and indeed it seems to be proved by the petition of the Jews of St. Eustatius, dated February 16, printed in the *Annual Register*, pp. 308-310, and in *Nederlandsche Jaerboeken*, 1781, pp. 817-820.

² *Gazette de Leyde*, March 27, p. 4, March 30, p. 8, April 6, p. 7; the petition, *ibid.*, April 27, May 1; *Nederlandsche Jaerboeken*, 1781, pp. 796-806.

³ Dumas to the president of Congress, *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 323; to John Adams, *Adams's Works*, VII. 408.

⁴ The debates are in Hansard, XXII. 218-262, 769-785, 1023-1026. See also a letter of John Adams in *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 460.

tion one other instance, in the warfare of the fifty years preceding, in which such a confiscation had taken place. He showed that, on the contrary, from the moment of surrender the conquered inhabitants were entitled to the royal protection ;¹ inveighed against the unrighteousness of punishing all for the illicit commerce maintained by some ; and declared, apparently with much truth, that public injury comparable with that caused by the illicit trade had been inflicted by Rodney's gigantic auction. At that auction the whole property had been sold at far less than its value, and the ultimate result had been that, in spite of the admiral's precautions, the Americans, French, and Spaniards had been supplied by the British government at a much cheaper rate than they otherwise could have been. Passing to the case of the British subjects, he pointed to the positive acts of Parliament under which English merchants traded to the island,² and ridiculed the contention that if wronged they could have redress through the courts, when all their books and papers had been seized. "It was not extraordinary," he said, "that a man sitting on a great gun in a ship's cabin should hold language like that of Admiral Rodney ; for however much he respected his naval character, his judgment as a lawyer could not be expected to have any consequence" ; and indeed Rodney seems to have been ignorant of certain important acts of Parliament,³ and to have openly flouted others.

More serious from a professional point of view was the accusation that the admiral, intoxicated with the pecuniary brilliancy of his prize, had lingered in the road of St. Eustatius, superintending with eager care the disposal of the spoil, and thus squandered away the opportunity of important naval successes which had been afforded him by the temporary naval weakness of the allies in the Caribbean. "Admiral Rodney," says Horace Walpole tartly, "has a little over-gilt his own statue."⁴ Certain it is, that he remained at the island three months and a day,⁵ and that meanwhile De Grasse, watched only by Hood's squadron, had slipped around the shoulder of Martinique and joined the other French ships in the roadstead of Fort

¹ Solicitor-General Yorke, in 1759, declared that the inhabitants of Guadeloupe, after conquest, were British subjects, with or without the taking of oaths of allegiance. Chalmers, *Colonial Opinions*, 642.

² Attorney-General Northey, in 1704, gave it as his opinion that it was no offense for a British subject on a neutral island to trade with the enemy during war-time, provided it was not in materials of war. *Ibid.*, 645.

³ It appears from Rodney's correspondence, Mundy, II. 116, that he did not know that by act of Parliament (apparently the act 17 Geo. III. c. 7 is meant) masters and mates of unarmed rebel trading vessels were exempted from capture.

⁴ *Letters*, ed. Cunningham, VIII. 93.

⁵ Till May 4. Mundy, II. 102.

Royal. Yorktown itself might never have happened if this juncture of the French had not been effected, and in all probability it would not have been effected if Rodney, with his whole fleet, had been where Hood wished him to be, to windward of Martinique.¹

Lord North's "fine brute majority" might stifle inquiry, but it could not control the operations of the courts of law, nor such retribution as might be offered by the fortunes of warfare. In the course of the legal proceedings no fewer than sixty-four claims appeared, amounting as stated to far more than the whole of the captured property. Rodney was subjected to great expense and vexation. The books and papers, sent to the care of the secretary of state, could not be found. Six years after the capture, only thirteen of the cases had been finally disposed of, and in nine of these there had been sentences of restitution.² The King had granted all the spoil to the captors, excepting only provisions, ordnance, arms, ammunition, and military stores, and Rodney and Vaughan should each have received a sixteenth part of the immense booty;³ but Vaughan declared in the House of Commons that he had not made a shilling by the transaction,⁴ and Rodney seems to have fared hardly better. They had made two successive and mutually conflicting arrangements for the general agency, which had embroiled them with the captains, and embarrassed and retarded the settlement.⁵

Much the most valuable part of the spoil had been, after careful preparation, sent to England in a large fleet of thirty-four merchantmen under convoy of Commodore Hotham, with two ships of the line and three frigates. Before they had reached the English coast, but only twenty leagues to the west of the Scilly Islands, a French admiral, LaMothe Piquet, having under his command a much superior force, fell in with the ill-fated convoy. Hotham signalled for the war-ships to draw closer and for the convoy to dis-

¹ *Letters of Sir Samuel Hood*, 17, 22, 23; Stevens, *Clinton-Cornwallis Controversy*, I. 83; Mahan in Clowes, *History of the Royal Navy*, III. 481, 482; *Types of Naval Officers*, 224, 228.

² Mundy, II. 5, 77, 367, 368. One of the suits became a leading case in prize law. The King's Bench having been moved for a prohibition to restrain the Court of Admiralty from condemning certain property, on the ground that it had been taken on land, not on the sea, Lord Mansfield in an elaborate opinion considered the foundation and nature of the prize jurisdiction of that court, and declared that the question of prize or no prize belonged solely to it, whoever the parties or whatever the place of capture; *Lindo vs. Rodney*, 2 Douglas 613-620 (1782). In 1783 the House of Lords sustained the same view in *Mitchell et al. vs. Rodney and Vaughan*; 2 Brown, *Reports of Cases in Parliament*, 423. *London Chronicle*, November 24-27, 1781.

³ *Letters*, 99, 101; Mundy, II. 79, 80, 112.

⁴ Hansard, XXII. 781.

⁵ The details are given in two pamphlets: *An Explanation of the Case relating to the Capture of St. Eustatius*, London, 1786; and *Saint Eustatius; Facts respecting the Captured Property, and Reasons in Support of a Bill, etc.*, *ibid.*

perse and save themselves. But the French made after the convoy and captured twenty-two of them. Only eight of the merchant vessels, together with the ships of war, succeeded in making their escape into Berehaven Bay.¹

So vanished a part of Rodney's expectations of wealth.² Before the end of the year St. Eustatius itself, which he supposed that Vaughan had made impregnable, was taken by the French. The recapture was planned by the principal French merchant of the place, in conjunction with the Marquis de Bouillé, the energetic governor of Martinique. The marquis landed 1,400 men at an unguarded point of the coast, and easily overcame the small force of 628 which Lieutenant-Colonel Cockburn, the British commander, had at his disposal. Upon Cockburn's trial at the Horse-Guards in 1783 it was testified that he had been offered reënforcements, but replied that he "had vagabonds enough already"; also that he had been warned of the French attack two days before it occurred, but had "damned the information."³ By the mismanagement of Rodney's agents his money at the island, which should have been sent to New York and so home, was detained and confiscated.⁴ The conquest on which he had prided himself as "the greatest blow that Holland and America ever received" ended in disappointment and vexation for him, reversal and odium for his country. But it was left for him, by the memorable victory of the twelfth of April, 1782, to show that, despite mistakes of public policy and faults of private character, he possessed a professional greatness that could lift his name to heights of glory as a naval commander.

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¹ *London Chronicle*, May 15-17, p. 465; another subsequently escaped into Plymouth. *Gazette de Leyde*, May 18, p. 8, May 25, p. 6, May 29, p. 2; *Nederlandsche Mercurius*, L. 212; *Rev. Dipl. Corr.*, IV. 412, 423, 437; Mundy, II. 61; Marshall, *Naval Biography*, I. 106.

² The *London Chronicle*, May 15-17, p. 466, estimates that Rodney and Vaughan will personally lose £300,000 by LaMothe Piquet's captures. The recaptured goods were not restored to the Dutch, as they would have been under the French-Dutch convention of May 1, 1781, but were adjudged to the French recaptors; *Gazette de Leyde*, June 12, pp. 3, 6.

³ Cockburn was cashiered and died soon after. The leading source of information on the recapture is *An Authenticated Copy of the Proceedings on the Trial of Lt.-Col. Cockburn (of the Thirty-Fifth Regiment) for the Loss of the Island of St. Eustatius*, London, 1783.

⁴ *Letters*, 169-171, 174; Mundy, II. 421, 422. The French are said to have got more than £120,000 in cash; *An Authenticated Copy*, p. 172.